Attachment – Project Description

Paradise Sewer Project Geotechnical and Other Investigations

The Town of Paradise (Town) proposes to construct and operate a new sewer system, which would include a new Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF) and a collection system within the Town. The proposed sewer project is being evaluated under a separate and comprehensive California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) analysis; however, the Town proposes to complete necessary subsurface geotechnical investigations, along with an Initial Site Assessment (ISA) and Phase II testing and utility potholing to inform site selection and support establishing design criteria.

The geotechnical investigations, ISA, and potholing would occur in locations of the proposed facilities, including the Collection System and the WWTF. Specific activities proposed within each of these components that have potential impacts on the physical environment are described below.

Collection System

Geotechnical Investigations

Geotechnical subsurface explorations and sample testing would be performed along the pipeline alignments to characterize their soil properties. These explorations would classify soil type; determine rock hardness; measure groundwater depth, if observed; and analyze corrosiveness. These factors would inform the design of the pipeline and possible actions to implement during installation.

Prior to starting field work, a pre-investigation would include reviewing existing geotechnical/geologic information, conducting a geotechnical desktop study, and reviewing soil/rock/groundwater information obtained for the project. The exploration program would consider access, traffic control, and geologic conditions. Underground Service Alert (USA North 811) would be completed, and access to exploration locations would be determined. Permits would be obtained from Butte County Environmental Health for borings and wells, and encroachment permits for borings within/adjacent to the public right-of-way would be obtained from Butte County and the Town of Paradise, depending on the jurisdiction affected.

The Town proposes up to 30 borings to assess the subsurface soil and groundwater conditions along the alignments indicated in **Figure 1**. The borings would include:

- 25 borings along the pipeline from the downtown collection system to the WWTF location.

- 5 borings along the collection system alignment downtown.

The exploratory borings would be conducted at approximately 700- to 1,000-foot intervals along the collection system pipeline alignments, to depths of approximately 15 to 30 feet or until refusal. Soil cuttings from auger borings would be stored in 55-gallon drums and tested for soil contamination. Soil drums would be stored on Town-owned property while testing is performed. Once soil testing is complete, the soil would be legally disposed.

Up to 15 seismic refraction surveys would be conducted in areas where shallow hard rock is expected (i.e., less than 10 feet below ground surface). The seismic refraction survey measures acoustic velocity, which can be correlated to primary wave velocities, which would be used to estimate how excavatable the area would be.

Pre-investigation and permitting are anticipated to begin in the winter/spring of 2026 upon approval of this CEQA categorial exemption. Subsurface explorations are anticipated to begin in spring 2026 after the pre-investigation.

Initial Site Assessment

The ISA serves to determine if the proposed collection system pipeline footprint crosses through areas of contaminated soil that require special handling and disposal during construction. The Phase I ISA would be conducted to identify evidence of Recognized Environmental Conditions (RECs) within or adjacent to the proposed project alignment, and evaluate if these conditions have the potential to impact the project design or implementation costs. The Phase I ISA would be performed according to ASTM E1527-21 and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) standards.

Phase II environmental soil sampling would be conducted along approximately 24,000 lineal feet of surface roadway. Soil samples would be collected from up to 27 sample locations (see **Figure 1**) and tested for the presence of hazardous materials. Sample locations would be spaced approximately 1,000 feet apart on alternating sides of the roadway. At each sample location, soil samples would be collected from approximately 0 to 6 inches, 12 to 18 inches, and 24 to 30 inches below ground surface. Samplers would collect samples using a hand auger (no power equipment) and decontaminate the sampling equipment between sample locations.

It is assumed that at least some of the existing concrete sidewalks, gutters, and curbing would be impacted by the sewer piping installation. Up to 10 samples of concrete along the project alignment would be collected and analyzed for asbestos.

It is anticipated that the Phase I ISA process would begin in winter or spring 2026 after the approval of this categorical exemption and the Phase II process would begin in summer

2026, with results feeding into the ongoing Paradise Sewer Project design and environmental clearance.

Utility Potholing

Utility potholing is performed to measure vertical depth of existing utility pipelines and to record existing pipe parameters (e.g., size, material, crossing direction) where existing utilities are crossing the proposed collection system pipeline alignment. The Town would complete up to 100 utility potholes along the project alignment down to the proposed Skyway South WWTF site. Potholing would occur where existing utilities cross the proposed sewer pipeline alignment. Efforts would include identifying the utility type as marked by USA, location, depth, size, and material type. Work would be performed in batches as potholing progresses.

It is assumed that individual potholes would be no greater than 10 feet below surface. It is further assumed that average utility depth would be 5 feet. A surveyor would survey pothole locations marked by the pothole crew and record the depth indicated. Six site visits are assumed for pothole surveys.

Utility potholing is expected to begin in fall 2026.

Wastewater Treatment Facility (WWTF)

There are currently two proposed WWTF sites as shown on **Figure 2**: one outside the western Town limits south of the Skyway (Skyway South), and the other partially within and partially outside of the western Town limits along the Skyway (Skyway Crossroads). Geotechnical investigations at both sites would aid in the selection of a site. The ISA and utility potholing, if necessary, would occur only at the site selected for WWTF construction. Environmentally sensitive areas would be avoided on both WWTF sites.

Geotechnical Investigations

Preliminary Geotechnical Investigations at Potential WWTF Sites

Proposed geotechnical investigations at the Skyway South and Skyway Crossroads WWTF sites would each include**:**

- Up to 4 seismic refraction surveys to further define bedrock depths at the potential treatment facility (up to 8 total at both sites).
- Up to 6 test pits using a backhoe up to 15 feet deep or until refusal is reached to classify subsurface soils and rock (up to 12 total at both sites).
- Up to 4 percolation tests between 5 to 10 feet deep to determine infiltration rates (up to 8 total at both sites).

Underground utilities would be marked prior to field visits. The overburden soil would be classified, thickness measured, and samples collected for lab testing that would be completed on select samples. Soil cuttings from auger borings and/or soil from test pits would be stored in 55-gallon drums and tested for soil contamination. Soil drums would be stored either at the site (pending property owner approval) or on Town-owned property while testing is performed. Once soil testing is complete, soil would be legally disposed.

A prepared study would provide the results of the geotechnical investigations. The results would be incorporated directly into the Paradise Sewer Project design and environmental review processes. Upon completion of the study, a WWTF site would be selected for further investigation.

The Preliminary Geotechnical Study process, including field review observations and study preparation, is scheduled to begin in winter 2026 after approval of this CEQA categorical exemption.

Geotechnical Investigations at Selected WWTF Site

Upon selection of the WWTF site by Town staff, the following additional field investigations would be conducted to obtain additional site-specific design parameters:

- 8 seismic refraction surveys to further define bedrock depths.
- 6 test pits using a backhoe up to 15 feet deep or until refusal is reached to classify subsurface soils and rock.
- 4 percolation tests between 5 to 10 feet deep to determine infiltration rates.
- 5 borings between 5 and 20 feet deep near the proposed WWTF structures.

The overburden soil would be classified, thickness measured, and samples collected for lab testing (to be completed on select samples). Seismic parameters per the California Building Code would be established.

The field investigations are scheduled to begin in spring 2026.

Initial Site Assessment

As with the Collection System, the ISA would determine if the selected WWTF site contains areas of contaminated soil that require special handling and disposal during construction. The Phase I ISA would be conducted to identify evidence of RECs within the WWTF site, and evaluate if these conditions have the potential to impact the project design or implementation costs. The ISA would be performed according to ASTM E1527-21 and Caltrans standards.

Phase II environmental soil sampling would be conducted at the selected WWTF site at locations determined by the ISA.

Utility Potholing

If existing underground utilities are encountered at the selected WWTF site, up to five potholes may be completed to further characterize the utilities. Potholing on the WWTF site would be conducted in a similar manner to potholing in the Collection System area.

Justification for Categorical Exemption

CEQA Guidelines, Section 15306, describes the Class 6 categorical exemption. Class 6 consists of basic data collection, research, experimental management, and resource evaluation activities, which do not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. These may be strictly for information gathering purposes, or as part of a study leading to an action which a public agency has not yet approved, adopted, or funded.

The purpose of the project is to gather geotechnical and other information that would be used for the design of a proposed Town of Paradise sewer system. The Town has not yet adopted a final plan for this sewer system, as its final design is dependent on information to be gathered by this project. The proposed borings, soil samplings, and utility potholing would occur only at specific locations. Individually and collectively, these activities would not disturb substantial areas of land and therefore would not generate significant environmental impacts.

CEQA Guidelines, Section 15300.2(a), notes there are exceptions to the use of a categorical exemption, with one exception specific to the Class 6 exemption. These exceptions are listed below, along with the reasons why these exceptions would not apply to this Class 6 categorical exemption:

- *Location on Which a Project Is Proposed Is a Particularly Sensitive Environment*. If a project may impact an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern, where it is designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies, then the Class 6 exemption would not apply.

  Environmentally sensitive areas are identified on **Figure 2**. These are areas where initial surveys found either biological or cultural resources that should be avoided at this time, as they are potentially protected by federal, state, or local statutes and regulations. Activities associated with the project would not be conducted within these environmentally sensitive areas. Therefore, the Class 6 categorical exemption would remain applicable to this project.

- *Cumulative Impact*. All exemptions are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place is significant over time. There are no other projects of the same type that would occur in the Town of Paradise. Therefore, no cumulative impact is associated with this project.
- *Significant Effect*. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant impact on the environment due to unusual circumstances. As noted, the project would have minimal impact at each activity site. Also, as discussed above, the project would avoid designated environmentally sensitive areas. No unusual circumstances were identified that could lead to a significant environmental impact by the project.
- *Scenic Highway*. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project that may result in damage to scenic resources, within a highway officially designated as a State Scenic Highway. No such highways have been designated in the project area.
- *Hazardous Waste Sites*. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site that is included on any list compiled pursuant to Government Code Section 65962.5. No such sites were identified within the project area.
- *Historical Resources*. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project that may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource. As discussed above, the project would avoid designated environmentally sensitive areas, which include cultural resource sites.

Summary

The project proposes to gather geotechnical and other information for the purpose of designing and ultimately constructing the Town of Paradise sewer system. Activities associated with the project, such as borings, soil sampling, and potholing, would not cause significant environmental impacts and would avoid designated environmentally sensitive areas. No exceptions to the use of this categorical exemption were identified. Therefore, this project meets the requirements for a Class 6 categorical exemption under CEQA.

Figure 1 – Conceptual Subsurface Investigation Site Plan – Collection System

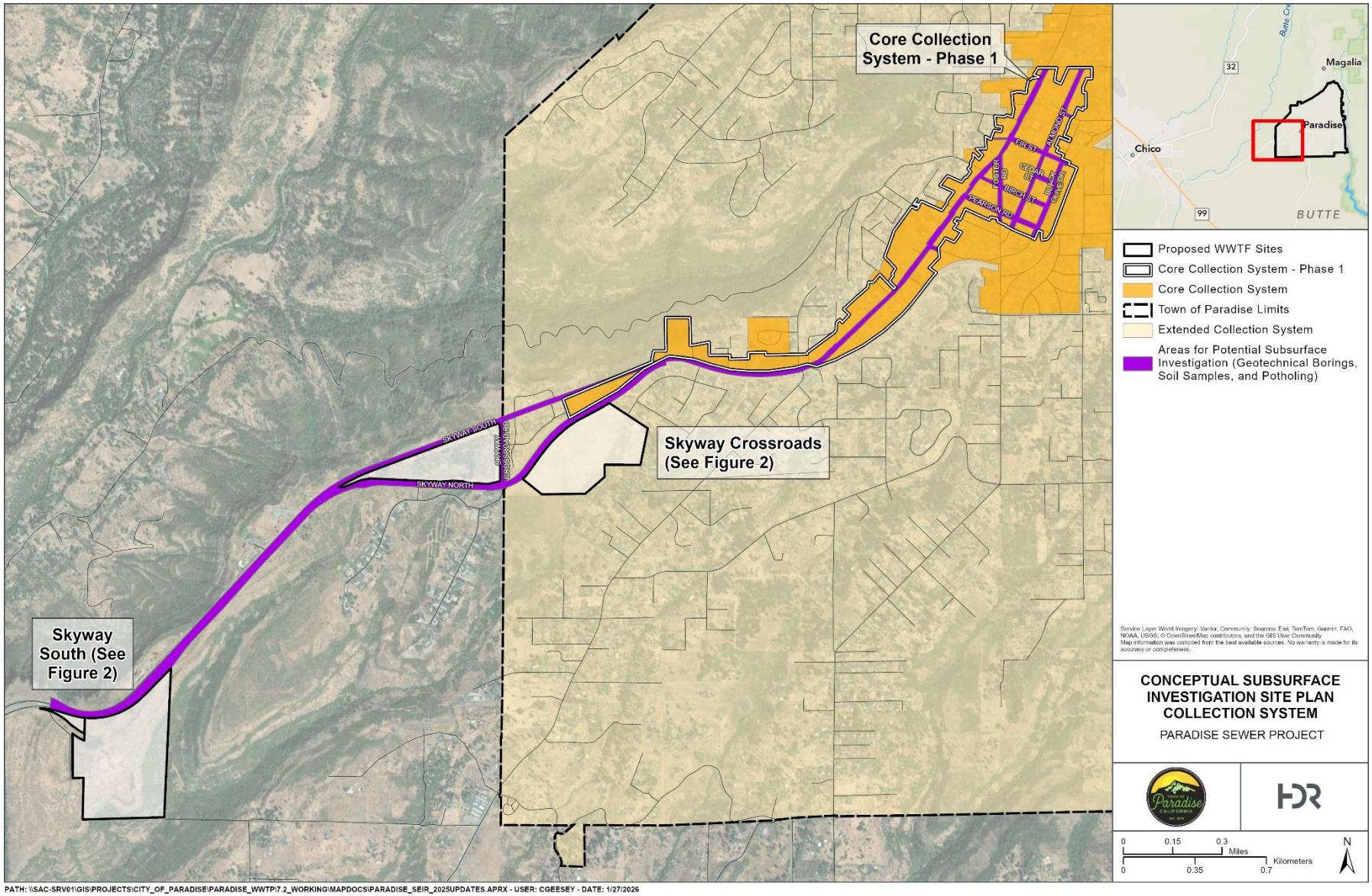

Figure 2 – Conceptual Subsurface Investigation Site Plan – Wastewater Treatment Facility